A DISCOURSE Concerning a DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

BRITISH MUSEUM

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TO THE

KING'S

MOST

Excellent MAJESTY.

May it please your Majesty

TO accept of this Treatise, part of which was preached in Your Royal Chapel before the late Queen, Your Majesty's Dearest Consort of blessed Memory. That I did not then present it

to the Hands of that Excellent Princeſs, was the Imperfection of the Work, (I having deſigned ſome further Enlargement on that Subject) otherwiſe I ſhould moſt chearfully have complied with ſome approving Intimation then given, in order to a Command for the Publiſhing of it. The Whole being now finiſhed, is moſt humbly ſubmitted to Your Majeſty's Cenſure, by

Your MAJESTY'S

Moſt Humble and Obedient

Subject and Servant,

William Aſſheton.

THE

PREFACE.

HAVING *made myself a Debtor to the Publick for* A Plain Method of Devotion for Sick and Dying Persons: *And one chief part of that Devotion being the Exercise of a true Repentance, for the Minister who visits the Sick Person, is directed by the Church of* England *to examine,* Whether he repent him truly of his Sins? *lest Men should from hence be encouraged to defer their Repentance to a Sick and Dying Bed, (as if they might safely enjoy their Sins in their Health, because they are admonished to Repent when they come to Die) I have there-*

fore very faithfully examined that Matter: And have endeavoured in the following Treatiſe to convince them, That though Repentance, as all other Graces, muſt be exerciſed and improved upon the approach of Death (for our Lamps muſt be trimmed when the Bridegroom comes) yet, A Death-bed Repentance is neither comfortable nor ſafe.

THE CONTENTS.

THE Soul is Immortal, and ſhall be eternally either happy or miſerable, Page 9
This Life the only time to fit and prepare us for our future eternal State, 10
The Vicious, Senſual, and Impenitent, ſhall be miſerable, ibid.
But ſuch as are obedient to the Laws of the Goſpel ſhall be happy, 11
Hence it is both our Intereſt and Duty to take Care of our Souls, and provide for Eternity, ibid.
But this generally neglected, and why, ibid.
The Caſe of a Death-bed Repentance ſtrictly examined, and in what Method, 12
What is meant by a Death-bed Repentance, ibid.

What by true Repentance, Page 13
The Vulgar Notion of Repentance, 14
Which yet, as is ſhewed, is no Goſpel Repentance, ibid.
What Repentance is ſaving, 18
How far, and in what manner a Sick and Dying Sinner can be able to repent, 19
Wicked Men, when they come to die, may remember their Sins, 24
They may alſo be very ſorry for their Sins, ibid.
They may earneſtly beg Pardon for their Sins, 26
They may make very ſerious Reſolutions of Amendment, ibid.
They may make Reſtitution, 27
Whether all this will amount to true Repentance? ibid.
Of the Labourers in the Vineyard, 47
The Caſe of the Thief upon the Croſs, 52
The Cloſe, 57

A

DISCOURSE

Concerning a

Death-bed Repentance.

IT is the faint Dictate even of natural Reason, but the more clear and full Discovery of Revelation, That when we die, when our Souls shall be separated from our Bodies, when we leave this World, we shall not then perish like the Brutes, and cease to be; but shall subsist and continue in another State and Capacity, either of Happiness or Misery, to all Eternity:

And we are further inſtructed from Divine Revelation in the Holy Scriptures, That this preſent Life, this ſhort and uncertain Time of Continuance in this World, is the only Space of Probation and Trial, to fit and prepare us for our future Eternal State. "As the Tree falls "ſo it lies." There is no Work nor Repentance in the Grave. But as Death ſhall ſeize us, in the ſame Capacity we ſhall appear before the Throne of God, and ſhall then be diſpoſed of in an irreverſible, unalterable State, either of Happineſs or Miſery.

Those who make their own Will their Law, and who are guided and acted by their own vicious ſenſual Inclinations, they ſhall be eternally miſerable. Or, according to the blunt way of expreſſing it in our *Engliſh* Language, they ſhall be *Damned*; that is, they ſhall be condemned to that State of Miſery, which the Juſtice of God hath prepared to be the ſad Lot and Portion of all impenitent Sinners.

But on the other Hand; Thoſe who follow the Divine Conduct, and are obedient to the Laws of the Goſpel; ſuch Perſons, through the Mercy of God, and

THE vulgar and common Notion of Repentance, is evidently this:

"When a Man hath committed a "Fault, and hath done ſomething amiſs, "and is then ſorry for it; is grieved and "troubled that he hath done it, and doth "heartily wiſh it had not been done." Such a man, we uſually ſay, doth repent of ſuch an Action.

BUT this is not the full adequate Notion of a Goſpel Repentance; or ſuch a Repentance as ſhall find Acceptance with God.

THIS is but the Repentance of Malefactors at the Gallows; nay, it is no other than the Repentance of *Cain* and *Judas*.

IT is obſerved, That the moſt profligate condemned Wretch, when he comes to die, will be very ſorry for what he hath done. He will be much aſhamed, and will have great Indignation againſt himſelf, to think he ſhould be ſuch a Fool to part with his precious Life, and all the Comforts and Satisfactions of this World, in ſuch a vile ignominious Manner, to be tied up like a Dog, perhaps for the taking of a few Sheep. How will ſuch a Fellow fawn upon, and flat-

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ter the Judge, "That if he will but "spare him, O what an honeſt Man "will he then be!" And yet do but procure his Pardon, and let him looſe, and he is quickly at the old Trade. Nay, it is great Odds but you have him again by the next Aſſizes.

Now, will any one pretend, that in ſuch a Caſe as this, there is true Repentance?

WHICH yet is more evident from thoſe Scripture Inſtances of *Cain* and *Judas*.

IT ſeems very probable from the Circumſtances of his Story, that *Cain* did repent of the Murder of his Brother. "My puniſhment, ſaid he, is greater than "I can bear," *Gen.* iv. 13. But becauſe in the Judgement of ſome learned Men, this is rather an Inſtance of Deſpair than Repenting-Sorrow; I ſhall not much inſiſt on this of *Cain*. But as to the other Inſtance of *Judas*, it is expreſs and undeniable.

YOU read his Story, *Matt.* xxvii. 3, 4, 5. "Then *Judas*, which had betrayed "him, when he ſaw that he was con"demned, repented himſelf, and brought "again the thirty Pieces of Silver to the

"Chief

" Chief Prieſts and Elders, ſaying, I have " ſinned in that I have betrayed the inno- " cent Blood. And they ſaid, what is " that to us? ſee thou to that. And he " caſt down the Pieces of Silver in the " Temple, and departed, and went and " hanged himſelf."

HERE are as ſignal Inſtances that *Judas* did ſincerely repent of what he had done, as can poſſibly be given. For, beſides the expreſs Teſtimony of the Holy Ghoſt, which in plain Terms tells us he did repent, and that he himſelf declared, " He had ſinned in betraying the inno- " cent Blood:" He further gives this Evidence that he was in earneſt, he not only reſtores the *thirty* Pieces, but in Horror and Conſternation of Mind, " he " went and hanged himſelf:"

HERE is, I ſay, in this Inſtance, as much Grief and Trouble, and Vexation, for the Commiſſion of a Sin, and as noted Evidence that he was heartily ſorry for it, as can poſſibly be ſuppoſed. And yet it is as plain, that this Repentance of *Judas* was not an Evangelical Repentance, ſuch a Repentance as was accepted by Almighty God. Our bleſſed Saviour, who is Truth itſelf, having

paſſed

paſſed this Decree upon him: "Wo unto that Man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed: It had been good for that Man if he had not been born," *Matt.* xxvi. 24.

It appears from theſe Premiſes that there is more required to a ſaving Goſpel Repentance, than Trouble of Mind. "When a Man hath committed a Fault, "he may be ſorry for it; he may grieve "and mourn that he hath done it; he "may heartily wiſh it had not been done; "he may make Reſtitution of his ill-"gotten Goods." All this may be done; thus far he may proceed, and yet his Repentance is but imperfect, and ſhall never find Acceptance with a pure and holy God.

But here you will ſay;

If Men may proceed thus far, and yet their Repentance is not true and ſaving; how ſhall we know that we have true Repentance: And wherein doth the Nature of it conſiſt?

To this I anſwer,

God only can inſtruct us what is true Repentance. That is, it is very agree-

able

able to the Majeſty and Sovereignty of God, to preſcribe the Terms and Conditions of Salvation, and to appoint his Creatures what they muſt do; how they muſt behave themſelves to be accepted by him.

Now there is no other way to be informed in this matter, but to conſult the holy Scriptures. In thoſe ſacred Writings, the divine Wiſdom hath ſufficiently revealed his Will, and hath plainly told us, "What it is that he requireth of us;" and "what we are to "do, that we may inherit eternal Life."

We are expreſly admoniſhed, "That "without Holineſs no Man ſhall ſee the "Lord," *Heb.* xii. 14. "That the Unrighteous ſhall not inherit the Kingdom "of God. Be not deceived: Neither "Fornicators, nor Idolators, nor Adulterers, nor Effeminate, nor Abuſers "of themſelves with Mankind, nor "Thieves, nor Covetous, nor Drunkards, "nor Revilers, nor Extortioners, ſhall inherit the Kingdom of God," 1 *Cor.* vi. 9, 10. "If ye live after the Fleſh, ye ſhall "die: But if ye through the Spirit do "mortify the Deeds of the Body, ye ſhall "live," *Rom.* viii. 13. "Be not deceived, "God

" God is not mocked: For whatſoever a " Man ſoweth that ſhall he alſo reap; he " that ſoweth to the Fleſh, ſhall of the " Fleſh reap Corruption: But he that " ſoweth to the Spirit, ſhall of the Spirit " reap Life everlaſting," *Gal.* vi. 7, 8. " For the Son of Man ſhall come in the " Glory of his Father, with his Angels; " and then he ſhall reward every Man ac- " cording to his Works," *Matt.* xvi. 27. " and *the Son of God* being made perfect, " he became the Author of eternal Sal- " vation unto all them that obey him," *Heb.* v. 9. And St *Paul* doth plainly admoniſh us, That " the Lord Jeſus ſhall " be revealed from Heaven, with his " mighty Angels, in flaming Fire, taking " Vengeance on them that know not " God, and that obey not the Goſpel of " our Lord Jeſus Chriſt," 2 *Theſſ.* i. 7, 8.

From theſe Places of Scripture (to omit many others) it evidently appears, " That actual Holineſs, and actual Obe- " dience to the Laws of the Goſpel, is the " indiſpenſable Condition of Salvation." And conſequently, to be only ſorry for our Sins; to be troubled that we have done amiſs; unleſs this Sorrow do bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance; that

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is, unleſs it be attended with actual Reformation and Amendment; it is not a true and evangelical Repentance, ſuch a Repentance as God hath promiſed to accept.

2. I am to examine, "How far, and "in what manner a ſick and dying Sin-"ner can be able to repent?"

And this I ſhall beſt perform by a plain Repreſentation of matter of Fact. Whilſt I faithfully remind you, how, or in what manner you may happen to die.

1. "You may die ſuddenly."

This hath been many a Man's caſe, and you have no Aſſurance to the contrary, but it may be yours. If ſome hidden Diſtemper do not thus extinguiſh the Lamp of Life, your own Sin and Folly may then puff it out. You may happen in ſome private Quarrel, unexpectedly to die by the Point of a Sword, and ſo may fall a Sacrifice to your Luſt, to your Malice, or Revenge. But whatever may occaſion your Death; if it be ſudden, it is then impoſſible for you to repent upon your Death-bed. And if you have not taken care in your Life-time to perform that great Work, then,

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according to the Laws of the Goſpel, you are utterly loſt and undone for ever. " For except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh."

2. " You may die raving mad, or ſtupidly ſenſeleſs."

THERE is a ſufficient Maſs of vicious corrupted Humours, or (as Phyſicians phraſe it) of Morbifick Matter in any of your Bodies, as may occaſion theſe ſad Symptoms, and diſmal Effects. And if this be your Caſe, where then is your Death-bed Repentance?

IT is neceſſary to Repentance (even in the vulgar Notion of it) that you ſhould not only remember your Sins, but ſhould alſo be ſorry for them. But now ſuppoſing your diſtemper is either a *Frenzy* or a *Lethargy*, or in any other Inſtance of ſuch a Nature as ſhall wholly deprive you of your Memory and Underſtanding, your Repentance is then impoſſible. But,

3. SUPPOSING it is neither *thus* nor *thus* with you; but that God in his Mercy gives you a ſlow and eaſy Paſſage out of this World. Suppoſe your Diſtemper is ſo gentle, that it neither diſtracts you with Pain, nor diſorders your Fa-

Faculties; but that, as we phraſe it, "You have your Senſes to the laſt." In ſuch a Caſe as this (which is the moſt favourable that can be ſuppoſed) I will now examine, how far any Man who hath ſpent the Time of his Health in Sin and Vanity, can be able to repent.

1. "Wicked Men, when they come "to die, may remember their Sins, "which they ſeldom think on in the "Time of their Health."

THE generality of Men are ſo wholly taken up with the Deſigns of this World, that they have neither Leiſure nor Inclination to think of the next. In what a Hurry ſuch Men do ſpend the Day, is very obvious to obſerve; and at Night, being loaded with Wine and Buſineſs, they ſleep over their Cares and their Sins together.

BUT when ſome lingring Diſeaſe ſhall confine them to their Chambers, or nail them to their Beds; when their Sleep is departed from them, and that they lie rolling and tumbling, and wiſhing for the Day; then they are at leiſure to conſider their Ways, and to remember what they have done, and to recollect the former Paſſages of their Lives.

2. "Wicked

2. "Wicked Men when they come to "die, may not only remember, but alſo "may be very ſorry, and much troubled "for their Sins; and may likewiſe make "a penitent Confeſſion of them."

THIS evidently appears from the former Inſtance of *Judas*, who was not a little troubled for betraying his Maſter; and as freely makes Confeſſion of his Fault; "I have ſinned, in that I have "betrayed the innocent Blood."

AND this is undeniable even from daily Obſervation: Thoſe who viſit ſick Beds, and hear the dying Groans of departing Sinners, are beſt able to tell you, how they will lament their former Lives, and what wretched Sinners they have been. And at ſuch a Time they will be very free and ingenuous in their Confeſſion, with *a thus*, and *thus* have I done; and withal they may mightily judge and condemn themſelves for it.

IF ever you have been laid upon a ſick Bed, with the Terrors and Apprehenſions of another World before you, then I appeal to your own Experience for the Truth of what I have now ſaid.

3. "Wicked Men upon their Death-"beds, may not only make a ſorrowful "Con-

" ſeſſion of their Sins, but alſo they may " earneſtly beg Pardon for them."

THERE is a Principle of Self-Preſervation in the moſt vicious carnal Man, which prompts him to be ſolicitous for Deliverance from an imminent Danger. A noted Inſtance of this you have in Seamen; ſuch Men (eſpecially the common Sailors) are not uſually over-zealous in Religion, and yet, in a dangerous Storm, or in a leaking, ſinking Ship, thoſe who ſeldom named God, unleſs in Oaths and Execrations, will now fall to their Prayers.

AND thus the moſt graceleſs, ſenſual, worldly Perſon, when he comes to die, and hath the Proſpect of another World immediately before him; when he ſees the infernal Pit open to receive him, O with what Earneſtneſs will he deprecate the divine Vengeance! How paſſionately will he pray unto God to ſpare him, to be gracious to him, to pardon and forgive him!

NAY, even thoſe who have been ſo careleſs and unconcerned, that they could never in their whole Life-time be perſuaded to remember our bleſſed Saviour's Paſſion in the way of his own

Inſtitution in the Holy Sacrament; yet theſe very Perſons, on their Death-bed, will pretend to remember it. They will then plead his Merits and Satisfaction, and will beg God's Pardon for the Sake of Jeſus Chriſt.

THIS likewiſe, as to Matter of Fact, is undeniably evident.

4. "Wicked Men, when they come "to die, may further make very ſerious "Reſolutions of Amendment of Life." And in ſuch Caſes this is the noted Language of a Death-bed.

"O what a wicked Wretch have I "been? I have done *thus* and *thus*. But "if God will now pleaſe to ſpare my "Life, and reſtore me to my Health, "I'll become a new Man. I'll no more "be guilty of ſuch Intemperance. I'll "be wanton and laſcivious no more. I'll "take heed of Lying and Slandering. "And I'll refrain from this Curſing and "Swearing. I'll be more careful to ſanc-"tify the Sabbath. I'll not only frequent "the Church, but for the future I'll no "more be guilty of vain Sports and "Paſtimes on the Lord's-Day. And on "the Week-Day, tho' I muſt follow "my worldly Buſineſs, yet I'll do it in

"depen-

" dependance upon God's Providence. " I will never more neglect to pray unto " God; but do now reſolve, Morning " and Evening to bend my Knees to my " Creator and Redeemer."

Laſtly, As an Evidence that he is ſincere, " He may make Reſtitution and " Satisfaction in ſeveral Inſtances."

He may declare that he bears no Malice, but doth freely forgive all the World. He may likewiſe reſtore his ill-gotten Goods; and may give Satisfaction to thoſe he remembers to have wronged.

And not only ſo; but for the Cloſe of all, he may be large in his Charity in Reverſion; and by his laſt Will and Teſtament may bequeath a bountiful Legacy to the Poor.

All this may be done, and it is the utmoſt that can be done upon a Death-bed.

3. Let us now impartially examine, " Whether all this will amount to true " Repentance:" Such a Repentance as ſhall find Acceptance with a pure and holy God.

1. " Wicked Men, when they come " to die, may remember their Sins."

But ſuch Remembrance being no other than the Exerciſe of a natural Faculty, is neither Repentance, nor any part of that ſaving Work. The vileſt Wretches do but too much remember their Sins, and pleaſe themſelves in that carnal Satisfaction they had in the Enjoyment of them.

But, you will ſay, this is not the Caſe. For ſuch a dying Sinner doth not barely remember his Sins, but he remembers them with Shame and Sorrow, and is much troubled for the committing of them. "And this Trouble, "and Sorrow, and Compunction of "Mind, we hope will be accepted as "true Repentance."

To this I anſwer;

Such a dying Sinner is indeed very much troubled, and is under great Anguiſh and Perplexity of Mind. But let us now ſtrictly examine what is the Occaſion of all this Conſternation? Is he ſorry that he hath offended God, that he hath tranſgreſſed the Laws of ſo gracious a Majeſty? This Pretence is not probable, when we reflect upon his former Con-

Converſation. He who made his own Will his Law, and never denied himſelf in any carnal Enjoyment; and tho' God himſelf in his holy Word hath expreſly declared, That *ſuch* and *ſuch* Things ought not to be done; yet becauſe of ſome preſent Pleaſure and Profit, he is reſolved to commit them. He who was not only pleaſed with his Sin, but gloried in his Sin, and boaſted in his Sin; it is very unaccountable that ſuch a Man, all on a ſudden, ſhould be thus ſorry for his Sin. It is ſtrange that his Judgment and Apprehenſion of Things ſhould be thus changed in a Moment.

For his Conviction, I'll ſuppoſe him to be reſtored to his former Health and Vigour, and that the former Paſſages of his Life, in any Inſtance, could be repeated. Being under ſuch pleaſing Circumſtances, can he then honeſtly and conſcientiouſly make this Expoſtulation of *Joſeph*, "How can I do this great "Wickedneſs, and ſin againſt God?"

It is true, that Man is now troubled; but for what? It is not for his Sin? (which he never had any Quarrel againſt) but in plain Terms, it is for the Puniſhment of his Sin.

He is indeed thus far troubled for his Sin. He is very much out of Humour that he can ſin no longer; that he hath loſt his Reliſh and Inclination to it. It makes him heavy and lumpiſh, that all his pleaſant Days are paſt and gone; and that nothing now remains but a ſad Reckoning and Account. "Rejoice, O "young Man, in thy Youth, and let thy "Heart chear thee in the Days of thy "Youth, and walk in the Ways of thy "Heart, and in the Sight of thine Eyes; "but know thou, that for all theſe "Things God will bring thee into Judg-"ment." It is this *Judgment*, this Reckoning and Account, that makes him quake and tremble.

When a poor dying Wretch, who hath neglected God and his Duty all his Life long, ſhall be now convinced by the decays of Nature, that his Soul muſt immediately be torn from his Body: When he looks upward, and there beholds a juſt Judge ready to pronounce a ſad Sentence upon him: When he caſts his Eyes downward, and there obſerves that Place of Horror, that flaming Furnace juſt ready to receive him: When he now ſees and conſiders theſe Things, which for-

formerly in the Days of his Vanity he had no Leiſure to think on; and further reflects, that all this Miſery is now brought upon him by his own Folly, and that with a very little Care and Forecaſt it might have been prevented. Being under ſuch ſad Circumſtances as theſe, it is but a natural Love of a Man's ſelf, it is no other than an Inſtance of Self-Preſervation, to be troubled and perplexed. In plain Terms, this Anguiſh of Mind for the Happineſs that is loſt, and the Torments that ſhall be endured, is the very Worm of the Damned that dieth not. And if ſuch Sorrow and Vexation as this is true Repentance, then thoſe miſerable Creatures ſhall ſadly repent to all Eternity. But,

2. "The dying Perſon is not only "ſorry for his Sin, but alſo makes Con-"feſſion of it, and very humbly begs "Pardon for the Sake of Jeſus Chriſt. "And will not this be accepted as true "Repentance?"

I anſwer;

We are indeed aſſured by St *John*, "If we confeſs our Sins, he is faithful and "juſt to forgive us our Sins," 1 *John* i. 9. But what kind of Confeſſion ſhall be

accepted, the holy Scriptures muſt inform us.

In theſe ſacred Writings we are often admoniſhed, that it is not an *Hiſtorical Confeſſion*; it is not a bare Acknowledgment that we have done *thus* or *thus*; but it is a penitential Confeſſion ſhall find Acceptance. "Whoſo confeſſeth, "and forſaketh his Sin, ſhall find Mer-"cy," *Prov.* xxviii. 13. A ſick and dying Man may indeed confeſs his Sins; but how far he can be able to forſake his Sins, that is, to amend and reform, ſhall be conſidered in its proper Place.

But you will ſay, "He not only con-"feſſeth, but he begs Pardon for the "Sake of Jeſus Chriſt;" and we have a gracious Promiſe, that at ſuch a time we ſhall be heard; "Call upon me in the "Day of Trouble, I will deliver thee, "and thou ſhalt glorify me," *Pſalm* l. 15. And our bleſſed Saviour hath aſſured us, "Whatſoever ye ſhall aſk the Father in "my Name, he will give it you," *John* xvi. 23. Now here is a poor languiſhing Creature in great Diſtreſs and Trouble, and will not God accept him for the Sake of Jeſus Chriſt?

I anſwer;

All the Promiſes of God in Jeſus Chriſt are *Yea* and *Amen*, that is, moſt ſure and certain: But then you muſt alſo know, Promiſes are conditional, and the Performance of them on God's Part doth ſuppoſe certain Qualifications and Conditions on our Part. "Having therefore "theſe Promiſes, dearly beloved, let us "cleanſe ourſelves from all Filthineſs of "the Fleſh and Spirit, perfecting Holi-"neſs in the fear of God," 2 *Cor.* vii. 1. intimating, that unleſs we cleanſe ourſelves from all Filthineſs, and do thus perfect Holineſs, we have no Title to theſe Promiſes.

Indeed Jeſus Chriſt hath promiſed, "thoſe that come unto him, he will in no "wiſe caſt them out," but will kindly receive them, and treat them as Friends. But upon what Terms he will receive them, and own them as Friends, he himſelf hath told us in theſe Words; "Ye "are my Friends, if ye do whatſoever I "command you," *John* xv. 14. "And be-"ing made perfect, he became the Au-"thor of eternal Salvation unto all them "that obey him," *Heb.* v. 9.

I have now ſhewed you, that actual Holineſs, or actual Obedience (which are one and the ſame thing) is the Goſpel Condition of Salvation. And if you can make it appear that a Man, who in the time of his Health was ſo far from the Practice of Religion, that he contemned and deſpiſed it, nay, perhaps ridiculed and burleſqued it: If, I ſay, ſuch a Man, when he is laid upon his ſick-bed, and is able to do nothing elſe, can obey the Laws of the Goſpel, and walk in the Ways of God's Commandments, then indeed you ſay ſomething; otherwiſe here is, as yet, but very ſlender Encouragement for a Death-bed Repentance. But,

3. We ſuppoſe farther, "That the dy-"ing Perſon makes very ſerious and paſ-"ſionate Reſolutions of Amendment of "Life. And will not the Mercy of God "accept theſe Reſolutions? In ſuch a "Caſe, will not he take the Will for the "Deed?"

To this I anſwer;

That when Men are in a great Fright, and are under the Apprehenſions of ſome imminent Danger, it is then the moſt com-

common Thing in the World to make Reſolutions. What will not ſuch Man promiſe, if they may but eſcape ſuch and ſuch a Danger! The Vows of Mariners and Seamen in a violent Storm, are a noted Inſtance of ſuch Reſolutions.

LET us now ſtrictly examine, Whether, or how far God will accept ſuch dying Reſolutions.

TO ſtate this Matter truly, you muſt obſerve, that Religion is repreſented in the Goſpel as our reaſonable or rational Service; and conſequently, that the Exerciſe of it muſt proceed from Judgment and Deliberation, not from ſudden Heat and Paſſion. We are admoniſhed by the wiſe Man, "Not to offer to God "the Sacrifice of Fools"; but when we make a Vow or Promiſe to him, deliberately to conſider how far, or in what manner we can be able to perform it.

Now there are *Two* Things to be conſidered in a dying Sinner's Reſolution, *Sincerity* and *Ability*.

AND *firſt*, it is not likely that a dying Sinner's *Intention* ſhould be ſincere; but that he may promiſe what he never intends to perform. Such a Wretch, who hath ſo far corrupted his Morals, may,

by

by the juſt Judgment of God, be depraved in his Underſtanding, and may vainly imagine that God is ſuch a one as himſelf. And becauſe he obſerves that frail Men have been often cheated by him, and have really believed him, whilſt he made Promiſes and Proteſtations of what he never intended, he is ſo fooliſh as to fancy, that an omniſcient God may be likewiſe thus impoſed on. And therefore he will be as large and as paſſionate in his Promiſes of Reformation, as the moſt notorious Malefactor ever was in hopes of Pardon. Whereas ſhould God reſtore him to his former Health and Vigour, he would then be as looſe and profane, as *luſtful* and *intemperate*, as *envious* and *malicious*, as *covetous* and *worldly* as ever he was before. We ſhould then quickly have him at his old Cant: "The Charms "of Beauty and good Company are not "to be reſiſted. God forgive me, I am "ſo uſed to this Swearing, I rap out an "Oath before I think on it. And I am "naturally ſo paſſionate, I ſee I cannot "help it." "But be not deceived; "God is not mocked: For whatſoever "a Man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap," *Gal.* vi. 7.

But

But ſuppoſe the dying Sinner were ſincere, and did really intend that Reformation which is now ſo ſolemnly promiſed; let him ſadly conſider, how unlikely it is he ſhould be able to perform all this.

For his Conviction, I muſt remind him,

There are *Two* Things neceſſary to all great Undertakings; *Ability* and *Opportunity*.

1. As to *Ability*: How difficult, if not impoſſible, it is for a ſick and dying Sinner to reform his Nature; if ever it hath been your own Caſe, you yourſelves will be eaſily convinced. When a Man is oppreſſed with Pain, diſtracted with the Clamours of his diſſatisfied Relations: Amidſt all this Noiſe and Diverſion, what can poſſibly be done? what Duties can be performed? Do but ſeriouſly think upon it, and your own Apprehenſion will excuſe my Enlargement.

But ſuppoſing he had the greateſt Capacity, pray, what Time is now left him to perfect ſo vaſt a Work? Evil Habits, which have been long in contracting, are not ſuddenly rooted out. When Luſts and Paſſions (by being often indulged)

are

are grown rampant, they are not eaſily mortified. A thorough Reformation is a Work of time, and muſt be done ſucceſſively, and by degrees. This is fully intimated, whilſt we are admoniſhed "to "go on to Perfection; and to grow in "Grace."

But what can that Man do who is now a dying? When the Sentence of Death is paſſed upon him, and his Phyſician hath given him over; to talk then of reforming his Life, when he now finds he can live no longer, is ſuch an intolerable Piece of Weakneſs, as in any other Inſtance would ſcarce be heard with Patience.

Suppose a dying Father, who had ruined his Family by his extravagant Courſes, ſhould thus comfort his dejected, impoveriſhed Children;

"Be of good Chear, I am now reſolv-"ed to be very frugal. I will provide "for you, and get you a good Eſtate."

Pray, what could be replied in ſuch a Caſe?

"Alas, Sir, you are a dying. You "cannot lift your Head off the Pillow. "You cannot live till the Morning. "And how ſhould you get us an "Eſtate?" To tell them further, "Ay, "but

" but I reſolve it, and I hope you will " believe me."

Such Reſolution would be but mean Satisfaction; and a very ſlender Supply of all their Wants.

The Application is eaſy, and pray make it effectual to yourſelves. In ſhort, Promiſes and Reſolutions are not Performances; nor were ever ſo accepted by God or Man. But you will ſay;

4. " He actually, thus far, performs " his Promiſes and Reſolutions, that " makes Reſtitution, and that in ſeveral " Inſtances. Will not this be accepted " as true Repentance?"

To this I anſwer;

That as *Reſtitution* is a moſt neceſſary Duty, to which all injurious Offenders are ſtrictly obliged; ſo it is the ſureſt Expedient to ſatisfy the Conſcience, and to convince both ourſelves and others of the Truth and Sincerity of our Repentance.

But upon a ſtrict Inquiry it will appear, how difficult it is for a dying Perſon to make ſuch Reſtitution.

For his Conviction, I muſt remind him: That the word *Reſtitution*, in its Latitude, denotes *Two* Things.

1. *The*

1. "The being reconciled to the Per-
"son whom we have offended."

2. "The giving him Satisfaction and
"Reparation for the Damage which
"hath been done him."

To explain this further, we are to obſerve: That in Sins againſt the *Second* Table, there is not only an Act of Diſobedience towards God, but alſo of Affront and Injury againſt our Brother. And he who truly repents, in both theſe Inſtances, will cancel and undo, and take away his Sin as far as poſſible.

Let us then examine, how far both theſe can be done by a dying Perſon.

1. The dying Sinner pretends to be reconciled to thoſe whom he hath offended. "He declares, He is very ſorry
"for the Envy and Hatred, the Ran-
"cour and Malice he hath been guilty
"of; and aſſures his Neighbour he is
"now very real, and deſires that what
"is paſt, may be forgiven and forgot-
"ten mutually on both ſides. He is
"heartily troubled that he hath ever
"done him any Wrong, and deſires
"him to forgive him; and withal aſ-
"ſures him, that he himſelf doth now
"forgive *him* and all the World, as he
"ex-

"expects to be forgiven for Christ's "Sake."

ALL this is plausible, and seemingly pious. But let me thus expostulate with this dying Sinner.

You say, you are now sorry for the Wrongs and Injuries you have done to such and such Persons. Let me ask you this short Question:

ARE you now able to affront them any longer? Is it in your Power to do them further Mischief? Is not your Malice now bridled, is not your Rancour limited and restrained?

FOR your Conviction, pray resolve me:

You say, you do now forgive. But were you thus ready to forgive in the Days of your Health and Vigour? Did not you then, on all Occasions, express your Resentments to the utmost? Did not you then gratify your Spleen, and take the Pleasure of Revenge, when it lay in your Power? What Reason is there now to believe you, whilst you protest you do forgive him?

You say, you forgive him, because you do not hurt him. You do not hurt him, because you cannot.

AGAIN,

AGAIN, you ſay, you forgive him. But what Hypocriſy is this, to pretend to forgive, when you have had your Revenge already, and that to the utmoſt, at leaſt as far as your own Safety, and reſpect to the Laws, would permit you to take it?

I WILL explain this further to you, in this following Caſe.

AN inſulting *Mahometan* confines his poor innocent *Chriſtian* Slave in a noiſome Dungeon, where with bad Air, and worſe Uſage, the poor Man's Heart is broke. And being told that he is dying, he pretends to be merciful, and gives orders for his Releaſe. But what a Cheat is this, to ſay he doth releaſe him, when he can keep him no longer? God hath releaſed him. For in the Grave, "the "Weary be at reſt; there the Priſoners "reſt together, they hear not the Voice "of the Oppreſſors," *Job* iii. 17, 18.

BY the Light of this Example you will eaſily underſtand the Value and Acceptance of a Death-bed Forgiveneſs.

AND juſt at the ſame rate,

2. THE dying Sinner makes Reparation and Satisfaction.

"HE

" He is convinced that he hath injured
" ſuch a Man, having wronged him in
" his Dealings to ſuch a Value; and is
" now not only ſorry for the Injury, but
" is alſo ready to make him Satisfaction.
" And is not this ſufficient Evidence of
" the Sincerity of his Repentance?"

Anſwer;

It is indeed very pleaſing to God, that thoſe who have been wronged by you, ſhould receive Satisfaction for the Wrongs you have done them. And if this Reparation is not made by you in Perſon, it muſt then be made by your Heirs in Reverſion. But withal you muſt be reminded, that though what is paid and ſatisfied by your Heirs, may in the Senſe of the Law be called your Payment; yet I much queſtion, whether in the Sight of God it will be ſo accepted.

For, to ſtate the Caſe fairly;

You are now ready to part with your Eſtate, and to diſtribute it in proportion to thoſe you have wronged. But, pray, who thanks you for this, to bequeath your Eſtate when you can keep it no longer?

longer? "Thou Fool, this Night thy "Soul ſhall be required of thee; then "whoſe ſhall thoſe things be which thou "haſt provided?" *Luke* xii. 20. that is, they are then none of thine. So that Satisfaction in Reverſion is not thine, but thy Heirs. And he who thus makes Reſtitution, he only pays his old Scores by drawing a Bill upon his Executors.

I have now diſtinctly examined what it is that a dying Sinner can be able to perform in order to Repentance. As alſo, what ſmall Hope there is, that ſuch kind of Repentance ſhould be accepted by a pure and holy God.

"A Man may remember his Sins; "he may be ſorry for his Sins; he may "confeſs his Sins; he may beg Pardon "for his Sins; with firm Reſolutions of "Amendment; nay, he may make ac-"tual Reſtitution to thoſe he hath "wronged, and yet may be rejected."

BUT you will ſay,

THIS is very harſh and uncomfortable Doctrine; and we can ſcarce think that you yourſelf will be ſo ſevere and ill-natured, as to practice accordingly. When you viſit ſick Beds, and hear a poor dying Creature to lament his Sins with Tears,

Tears, and moſt earneſtly beg Pardon for the Sake of Jeſus Chriſt: When you obſerve how paſſionately he reſolves, "That if God will but ſpare him, he "will become a new Man, and never "more be guilty of ſuch Extravagance."

WHAT do you ſay or do in ſuch a Caſe? Nay, what muſt ſuch a wicked Man do, who having lived a vicious Life, ſhall thus happen to be ſurprized by Death?

DARE you be ſo uncharitable as to paſs the Decree upon him, and ſay, "That "he is paſt Hope: There is no Remedy, "but he is certainly damned?"

I anſwer;

I dare not preſume to limit the *Holy One*, whoſe Mercies are infinite. In ſuch a Caſe I will not cenſure, but admoniſh and inſtruct. I will exhort the dying Sinner to remember his Sins; to bewail his Sins; to beg Pardon for his Sins; to make firm Reſolutions of Amendment; and, where there is Occaſion, to make Reſtitution. And having prayed earneſtly for him, and commended him to God's Mercy, "Do I then ſay, Such a one ſhall "be damned? No; I dare not. But do "I ſay he ſhall be ſaved? No; I can-"not."

"not." What then do I resolve? What do I determine in this Matter? I will be silent, and determine nothing. For as I dare not flatter him into a false and groundless Presumption, so neither would I sink him into the Horror of Despair. I say, I will determine nothing; "I will "judge nothing before the time." All that I can do, in this dark, intricate Case, is, to "Commend him to the extraordi- "nary Mercy of God, to which we must "leave some great Cases, not knowing "what to judge of them ourselves. Pos- "sibly God, "who will have Mercy on "whom he will have mercy," may "please to let this dying Sinner be a sig- "nal Example of his unlimited Power "and Prerogative, to save beyond all "ordinary Rules."

WHETHER it may be *thus*, or *thus*, I dare not determine. What God can do, *ex plenitudine Potestatis*, or by his Prerogative, is not for us to dispute. However, I must be so faithful to my Office, as to admonish this dying Sinner, That the Gospel, by the Laws of which we must be judged, doth expressly declare, "That actual Holiness, and actual Obe- "dience, are the necessary Conditions

"of

" of Salvation." When therefore a Man hath been vicious and extravagant all his Life long, if God doth accept his dying Reſolutions, it is more than he hath promiſed: And it is more than he hath given us Authority to preach and declare.

But are we not told in the Goſpel, " That the Labourers were rewarded " who came into the Vineyard at the ele- " venth Hour?" And that " the Thief " upon the Croſs was received into Para- " diſe?" And are not theſe *two* Examples ſufficient for a Death-bed Repentance?

I anſwer;

It is very deplorable, what ſlight, trifling Pretences, what thin, fig-leaf Excuſes, ſome Men will make for the Neglect of their Duty. As in particular may appear by a ſtrict Examination of theſe two Inſtances.

I. *Of the Labourers in the Vineyard.*

THIS being a Parable, is to be interpreted as all other Parables ought to be.

It is a Rule among the Schoolmen, *Theologia Symbolica non eſt Argumentativa*; that is, Arguments are not to be drawn

drawn from the particular Circumſtances of Parables, but only from the chief Scope and Deſign of them.

Now when you have obſerved the Scope and Deſign of this Parable, which you read *Matt.* xx.) you will then eaſily be convinced, what ſlender Encouragement it gives for a Death-bed Repentance.

The Story is this:

"A Maſter of a Family hires a Company of Workmen to dig in his Vineyard. Some he hires early in the Morning, and bargains to give them a *Peny a Day* for their Labour. About the *third* Hour, (which anſwers to our *nine* in the Morning) as alſo at the *ſixth* Hour, (which is our *twelve* at Noon) and at the *ninth* Hour, (which is our *three* in the Afternoon) he hires more Labourers, with this Condition, *Whatſoever is right I will give you*; that is, I will not bind myſelf to give you the Wages of a whole Day for working part of it; but according as you behave yourſelves, I will reward you."

"At the *eleventh* Hour (which is about our *five* in the Evening) he takes in more

" more Workmen upon the ſame Terms. " And at Night he gives them their Wa- " ges, and pays them all alike. And " though ſome of them were diſcontent- " ed at this ſort of Diſtribution, and " thought it unequal, that thoſe who " had worked but one ſingle Hour, " ſhould be paid as largely as they, who " had ſweat for it all the Day; yet they " were quickly ſilenced by being told, " *Friend, I do thee no wrong*; that is, " they had their Bargain. And what " reaſon had they to envy and murmur, " if either to encourage Induſtry, or to " expreſs his own Bounty, he had given " to theſe *laſt* as unto them who were " *firſt?*"

THIS is the Parable. The Interpretation of which the meaneſt Capacity will thus eaſily comprehend.

ALMIGHTY God, the great Houſholder, calls ſeveral Labourers, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, into the Vineyard, the Church, at ſeveral Hours of the Day, that is, in different Ages of the World, and at ſeveral times of Mens Lives. Thoſe who came in at the *eleventh* Hour, that is, in the declining Part of their Lives, they had their Reward of Glory, as well as thoſe who came in at the firſt.

FROM which Parable ſome Perſons have made this Inference;

THAT though a Man may have loitered all the Day, and waſted the Time of his Life in Sin and Vanity, yet if he comes in at the *eleventh* Hour, that is, if he repents, and is ſorry for his Sin at his Death, God will then both accept and reward him.

BUT this is a very groſs and fatal Miſtake, and it is the greateſt Charity to make Men ſenſible of it.

Now in order to ſuch Mens Conviction, I ſhall deſire them to conſider.

1. THEY who came in at the *eleventh* Hour, they came in and worked as ſoon as they were called. Had they been called ſooner, they would have worked ſooner. Had they been called at the *ninth* Hour, they would have worked from the *ninth* Hour. Had they been called at the *ſixth* Hour, they would have worked from the *ſixth* Hour. Had they been called early in the Morning, they would have worked from that Time. This being the very Reaſon they gave for their Idleneſs, viz. *No Man hath hired us.*

BUT

BUT what is this to the Caſe of a dying Sinner now under the Goſpel? Who was called upon and invited to work, not only at the *eleventh* Hour, or at the *ninth* Hour, or at the *ſixth* Hour, but early in the Morning, even in the very beginning of his Life; from his Childhood, in the dawning of the Day he was called to this State of Salvation. But he obſtinately refuſed to work, and reſiſted the many Calls and Invitations of God, and ſlighted the Warnings and Admonitions of his Miniſters. He waſted his Time, and ſquandered his Days in Idleneſs and Luxury: And being now come to the Period of his Life, he only begs Pardon for not working. I ſay, what Pretence of Comfort can he frame from this Parable, that God will reward him only for *Wiſhings* and *Wouldings* at the laſt Gaſp? But,

2. THOSE Labourers who came into the Vineyard at the *eleventh* Hour, tho' indeed they came *in* late, yet they worked *one* Hour, and they continued labouring to the Cloſe of the Day; but had they ſtaid to the *twelfth* Hour, when working was over, and ſhould thus make their Confeſſion to the Steward: "Sir, it "is true, you hired us in the Morning,

" and we promiſed you to come and " work. But ſo it happens, we have been " idling and loitering, and diverting our- " ſelves all the Day. However, we are " now ſorry for it, and hope you will " paſs it by, and give us our Wages a- " mongſt the reſt."

PRAY, what Anſwer would he make to ſuch Men as theſe?

THIS is the very Caſe of a Death-bed Repentance. For the dying Sinner doth not ſo much as come *in* at the *eleventh* Hour, but ſtays till the *twelfth*; till *Night cometh, when no Man can work.* He hath been trifling and loitering, revelling and carouſing, all the Time of his Life; and now expects at his Death that God ſhould reward him, becauſe the Labourers in the Vineyard, who came not in till the *eleventh* Hour, did receive their Wages equal with the firſt. But, I ſay, how great a Cheat he puts upon himſelf in this Compariſon will eaſily appear from theſe Premiſes to any conſidering Perſon.

IT is true, thoſe who came in at the *eleventh* Hour, they had their Wages, for they did work *one* Hour. But what then? *Therefore* thoſe ſhall be rewarded who did not work at all. This is indeed the noted

noted Logick of a dying Sinner. But the Inference is too trifling to deſerve a Confutation.

The *ſecond* Inſtance commonly urged in favour of a *Death-bed Repentance*, is,

The Thief upon the Croſs.

YOU read his Story *Luke* xxiii. from *ver.* 39. " Our bleſſed Sa-" viour being crucified between *two* " Thieves, " One of them railed on him, " ſaying, If thou be Chriſt, ſave thyſelf " and us. " As if he had ſaid, " If thou art " what thou pretendeſt to be, a *Chriſt*, " a *Saviour*; if thou art not a Cheat and " Impoſtor, " ſave thyſelf and us. But " the other anſwering, rebuked him, ſay-" ing, Doſt not thou fear God, ſeeing " thou art in the ſame Condemnation? " And we indeed juſtly." That is, " we were juſtly condemned, and we " juſtly now ſuffer the Sentence of our " Condemnation. " For we receive the " due Rewards of our Deeds; but this " Man hath done nothing amiſs:" that " is, he is an innocent Perſon whom the " *Jews* and *Romans* do thus barbarouſly " murder. " And he ſaid unto Jeſus, " Lord, remember me when thou comeſt

" into thy Kingdom." As if he had ſaid, " though theſe condemn and revile thee " as mean and deſpicable, yet I acknow- " ledge thee to be a great Lord, and that " thou haſt a Kingdom to diſpoſe of." " And Jeſus ſaid unto him, Verily, I " ſay unto thee, To Day ſhalt thou be " with me in Paradiſe," that is, imme- " diately after thy Death thou ſhalt go to " a Place of Happineſs, and there abide " with me as a Member of that my " Kingdom which thou now aſkeſt for." *This is the Story of the Thief upon the Croſs.*

FROM whoſe Example, carnal, licentious Perſons do thus encourage themſelves in their extravagant Practices.

" WE are fully convinced of the ne- " ceſſity of Repentance. And we do as " fully reſolve, ſome time or other, to " repent. But why ſhould we be ſo for- " ward to diſturb our Pleaſures, and " neglect our Buſineſs, as to do it *now*, " ſince we may repent hereafter at better " leiſure? And though we ſhould be ſo " far diverted, as not to repent till our " Death, yet we have here an encourag- " ing Example, we ſhall then be accept- " ed. This Thief had been very noto-

" rious

" rious and extravagant, an Offender of " the firſt Rate; and yet when he calls " for Mercy, though it was with his laſt " Breath, his, " Lord, remember me " when thou comeſt into thy Kingdom," " was comfortably anſwered with a " This Day thou ſhalt be with me in Pa- " radiſe." " And therefore though the " greateſt part of our Lives, like this " Thief's, may have been ſpent in Sin " and Vanity, yet if we can but ſay, " Lord have Mercy upon us," with our " laſt Breath, we ſhall likewiſe be ac- " cepted."

To this I anſwer;

It is a dangerous Thing to preſume on God's Mercy. And ſo provoking is ſuch Preſumption, that if the bare laying of theſe Words, " Lord, have Mercy " upon me," would ſave thy Soul, it may ſo happen, through the juſt Judgment of God, thou mayſt not be able to do it.

Thou mayſt die ſuddenly, or thou mayſt die ſtupid, or raving mad.

But ſuppoſe thou haſt both Breath, and the Uſe of thy Reaſon, to ſay theſe Words, here is very ſlender Encourage-

ment from the Example of this Thief, that a dying Sinner, who never repented till his Death, ſhall then find Mercy.

For to prove the Validity of a *Death-bed Repentance*, from the Example of this Thief, *two* Things are ſuppoſed.

1. "That this Thief was a very wicked Man."

2. "That he continued in his Sins, "and did not repent till the Time of his "Death."

Now if neither of theſe *two* can be proved, then the Caſe of this Thief is not parallel, nor a firm Foundation for the Validity of a *Death-bed* Repentance.

It doth not appear, "That this Thief "was a very wicked Man."

He is called indeed a Thief, and dies as a Malefactor. But now, a good Man, and who is ſo in the general Courſe of his Life, may by Surprize, and the Violence of a Temptation, be guilty of a very bad Action, of which he afterwards doth ſincerely repent. The very Caſe of *David* and *Peter*. But farther, he is called indeed a *Thief* in our Tranſlation; λῃστὴς, in the *Greek*, *Latro* in the *Latin*.

But

But what theſe Words do properly ſignify, we muſt further examine.

It was the Character of *Barabbas*, that he was λῃστὴς, a Robber. So we tranſlate it, *John* xviii. 40. But what kind of Perſon he was, may be inferred from other Places of Scripture.

It is ſaid of this *Barabbas*, That "for "a certain Sedition made in the City, and "for Murder, he was caſt into Priſon," *Luke* xxiii. 19. And St *Mark* tells us, Chap. xv. 7. "There was one named "*Barabbas*, which lay bound with them "who had made Inſurrection with him," that is, at his Inſtigation and Procurement. He was, it is probable, the Ringleader and Captain of the Rebels. The which Conjecture is further confirmed by the Story of this *Barabbas* it St *Matt.* xxvii. 16. "They" (that is the *Jews*) "had then a notable Priſoner called *Ba*-"*rabbas*;" δέσμιον ἐπίσημον. Now the Word ἐπίσημος, ſignifies an *eminent Perſon*, a *Man of Note and Quality*.

This *Barabbas* then was the Head of the Party, who, as Zealots for their Nation and Religion, had made a riſing againſt the *Romans*; in which Attempt being unſucceſsful, they were puniſhed

as Malefactors. And yet this *Barabbas*, though the Captain General of a Party, is called λῃστὴς, *Latro*, a *Thief*.

And in Confirmation of this, I muſt further obſerve to you, that the Word *Latro*, which is now a Term of Ignominy and Reproach, and is uſually tranſlated a Thief, or a Robber, did anciently ſignify no more, as the beſt Authors inform us, than a *hired Soldier*. And *Latrocinari pro Militare*, is noted Language in *Plautus*.

So that this penitent Thief, as great a Malefactor as he is uſually ſuppoſed, was no worſe (for ought we know to the contrary) than a Soldier, who happening to be on the wrong Side was puniſhed as a Malefactor.

But now ſuppoſing,

2. That this Thief had been a very wicked Man; (which is more than was ever proved againſt him) yet, "How "do we know that he did not repent, "even long before he died?" And if ſo, if he had formerly repented, then his Caſe is nothing to the Purpoſe; nor can his Example, with any ſhew of Reaſon, be urged in favour of a Death-bed Repentance.

But

But ſuppoſing,

3. That this Thief was, 1. *A very wicked Man*, not a Soldier, as the Word may be rendered, but a *Thief*, and a *Robber*, in the ſtricteſt Senſe; and ſuppoſing, 2. "That he did not repent till "his Death." Yet I ſhall ſhew, *ex abundanti*, that his Example ought not to be urged in favour of a Death-bed Repentance. As will more fully appear by examining the Circumſtances of the Thief's Converſion.

1. It is poſſible he never heard of Chriſt till his Crucifixion.

If he was a *Gentile*, and not a *Jew*, it is highly probable he never did. For Chriſt, at firſt, "was not ſent but to the "loſt Sheep of the Houſe of Iſrael." And the Commiſſion, "Go, teach all Na-"tions," was not enlarged till the Day of his Aſcenſion. If this was his Caſe, "How could he believe on him, of "whom he had not heard?" So that on this Suppoſition no other than a Death-bed Repentance was poſſible to this Thief.

2. Suppoſing he had heard of Chriſt, and that he was informed by common Fame that there was a Man called *Jeſus*, who had done great Miracles; and that

ſeveral

ſeveral had this Opinion of him, that he was the *Meſſias* whom God had promiſed to ſend into the World: Yet all this was but general and confuſed Knowledge.

He had indeed heard of Chriſt, and the ſeveral Paſſages concerning him. But ſuch was the Courſe of Life this Thief is ſuppoſed to have led, that he had no great Curioſity to enquire over-ſtrictly into ſuch Matter. But when it ſo happened that he was apprehended for Robbery, and condemned to die at the ſame time with Chriſt; this in all Probability made him curious to enquire after him, and to learn all the Circumſtances of his Apprehenſion, Trial, and Behaviour. From whence he obſerved ſo much as convinced him that he was the true *Meſſias*. And ſo he believed on him, and had Salvation by him.

But what Encouragement is this to thee, O preſuming Chriſtian! who waſt baptized into Chriſt, and diſtinctly inſtructed in the Doctrine of the Goſpel, even from thy Childhood?

Had this Thief, as thou art, been early admitted into the Church; Had he then been inſtructed in his Duty, and conſtantly admoniſhed to continue in it; and

and if after ſuch Admiſſion, ſuch Inſtructions and Exhortations, had he ſtill lived upon the Pad, and ſpent his Time in Roving and Robbing, in Luxury and Injuſtice; and had rejected the Warnings and Admonitions of his Teachers. Had this been his Caſe, we have then the juſteſt Reaſon to pronounce, that a ſhort Ejaculation at his Death would not have been accepted; and his, "Lord, re-"member me," would have been rejected, with a "Depart from me, I know "thee not, thou worker of Iniquity." But,

3. "The Caſe of this Thief was mi-"raculous and extraordinary." And that whether we conſider the Penitent, or the Grace of God in pardoning.

1. As to the Thief; probably he had lived in great Ignorance, and never had the Means of Grace till now. And therefore to profeſs his Faith in Chriſt when he ſaw him hanging upon the Croſs was very ſignal and extraordinary.

He confeſſed Chriſt when his own Diſciples fled from him, and when *Peter* himſelf denied him. Nay, ſo great was the Scandal of the Croſs, that all Men then forſook him, and loſt their Faith

Faith in him, and had no further Hope of Help and Salvation from him.

Now to confeſs and own him at ſuch a Time as this, was ſo pleaſing and acceptable to our Saviour, that he makes him a ſignal Inſtance of his Grace and Favour.

2. It was very agreeable to the Divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs to do ſomething extraordinary on ſuch a ſolemn Occaſion as this. Thereby to ſignalize the Efficacy of our Saviour's Mediatorſhip, and that at ſuch a Time, when the Dignity and Glory of his Perſon was moſt clouded and obſcured.

From theſe Premiſes it appears, That this Inſtance of the Thief upon the Croſs was miraculous and extraordinary. And we have a known Rule, *Extraordinaria non debent eſſe Exempla*; extraordinary Caſes are no Rule for Practice.

The *Iſraelites* had Manna ſhowred down from Heaven; Will you therefore leave your Huſbandry, and expect your Bread from the Clouds? Will you adventure to leap into the Sea, becauſe you read that *Jonah* was ſaved from thence? Look upon this Thief as a *Jo-*

nah

nah in the Sea; a Miracle of Grace, a Prodigy of Providence.

A King in his Progreſs paſſing by the Place of Execution, as an Inſtance of his Royal Favour, pardons a Thief with a Rope about his Neck; dare you therefore be encouraged to play the Thief, in hopes of ſuch a ſtrange and unuſual Pardon?

And if you dare not thus venture your Life, your temporal Concern; dare you hazard your Soul, your eternal Concern?

To conclude.

Our Bleſſed Saviour in pardoning this Thief in ſuch an extraordinary Manner, hath ſhewed us what he *can* do, that none may deſpair. But he hath likewiſe declared in his holy Word what he ordinarily *will* do, that none may preſume. He hath plainly told us, "That without Holineſs no Man ſhall "ſee the Lord," *Heb.* xii. 14. And "that every one ſhall receive the Things "done in his Body, according to that "he hath done, whether it be good or "bad," 2 *Cor.* v. 10.

The

The CLOSE.

I Have now faithfully repreſented the Uncertainty and Danger of a *Death-bed Repentance.* And have plainly admoniſhed you, that if you neglect to repent *now*, and defer this neceſſary Work to you know not *when*, hereafter, you have juſt Cauſe to fear you will *never repent.* For, either you may be prevented by a ſudden Stroke, and ſo your Repentance is impoſſible, or elſe diſturbed with the Pains and Tortures of a languiſhing Bed. Which indeed may diſtract you with Remorſe and Anguiſh, with Horror and Deſpair; but it is much to be feared, without true Repentance.

I do much hope (and do earneſtly pray) that what I have now ſaid on this Subject may make its due Impreſſion upon you. But the more effectually to perſuade you, give me leave to enforce my

my Admonitions, with the noted Words of a truly great and good Man, now with God.

" LET no Man deceive you with " vain Words, or with false Notions of " a slight and sudden Repentance. Do " not delude yourselves with vain " Hopes, that this Work may be done " at any Time, and in an Instant; and " that if you can but fashion your last " Breath into, Lord have Mercy upon " me, this will prevail with God, and " make Atonement for the long Course " of a wicked and sinful Life.

" What strange Thoughts have Men " of God and Heaven? As if Heaven " were an *Hospital*, founded on Purpose " to receive all sick and maimed Persons; " that, when they can live no longer to " the Lusts of the Flesh and sinful Plea- " sures of this World, can but put up a " cold and formal Petition to be admit- " ted there.

" No, no; as sure as God is true, they " shall never see the Kingdom of God, " who instead of seeking it in the first " Place, make it their last Refuge and " Retreat. And when they find them-

selves,

" ſelves under the Sentence of Death and " Damnation, only to avoid preſent Ex- " ecution; and ſince there is no other " Remedy, do at laſt bethink themſelves " of getting to *Heaven*, and fall upon " their Knees, to petition the *Great* " *Judge of the World* that they may be " *tranſported* thither.

" Can any Man in reaſon expect that " ſuch a Petition will be granted? *I tell* " *you, nay; but except you repent* ſooner, " and at a fitter Time, and after a better " Faſhion, *you ſhall certainly periſh.* As " much as God deſires the Salvation of " Men, he will not proſtitute *Heaven*, " and ſet the Gates of it wide open to " thoſe who only fly to it in Extremity, " but never ſought it in good Earneſt, " nor indeed do now care for it, or de- " ſire it for any other Reaſon, but to ex- " cuſe them from going to *Hell.* They " have no value for *Heaven*, becauſe they " are in no wiſe fit for it. But yet they " think *Hell* to be the worſe Place of the " two.

" I am afraid this is the true Interpre- " tation of many a Man's Repentance, " who hath deferred it till he comes to " die.

" die. I do not ſpeak this to diſcourage " Repentance even at that time. I deny " not the Poſſibility of the Thing. But " to ſpeak the beſt of it, it is a very dan- " gerous Remedy. For, alas! how unfit " are moſt Men at ſuch a Time for ſo " great and ſerious a Work as Repent- " ance is, when they are unfit for the " ſmalleſt Matter; and how hard is it for " any Man then to be aſſured of the " Truth and Reality of his Repentance, " when there is no ſufficient Opportuni- " ty to make Trial of the Sincerity of it? " I deſire to have as large Apprehen- " ſions of the Mercy of God as any Man; " but withal, I am very ſure that he is " the hardeſt to be impoſed upon of any " in the World. And no Man that hath " any worthy Apprehenſions of the De- " ity, can imagine him to be ſo eaſy, as " to forgive Men upon the laſt Word " and Intimation of their Minds; and to " have ſuch a Fondneſs for Offenders, as " would reflect upon the Prudence of " any Magiſtrate and Governor upon " Earth."

" God

"God grant that I may sincerely endeavour to live a holy and virtuous Life: And may have the Comfort of that when I come to die. And that I may never be so unwise as to venture all my Hopes of a blessed Eternity upon a Death-bed Repentance."

Vid. Archbishop *Tillotson*'s Sermon on *Eccles.* xii. 1. and Sermon on *Heb.* iii. 13.

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